

Ideas for Resolving Conflict

Washington State Employee Assistance Program

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While conflict may seem negative, it is a natural event in relationships between people. We simply cannot avoid it. It occurs because people care about each other, their personal goals, individual priorities, and themselves. In itself, conflict is neither good nor bad. It is what we do with it that makes the difference.

Talk directly to the parties involved. Assuming there is no threat of physical violence, a one-on-one of private setting is best. Be certain that no one is being misquoted or misinterpreted; use reflective listening, simply repeating back to the speaker what you think he/she is trying to say. Direct conversation is much more effecting than complaining to everyone else.

Choose a good time. Plan to talk to the other person at the right time and allow enough time for a thorough discussion. Do not start talking about the conflict just as the other person is leaving for work, after you have had a terrible day, or right before you have something important to do. Just before a child enters the show arena is not a good time to discuss a conflict with them. Try to talk in a quite private place where everyone can be comfortable and undisturbed for as long as the discussion takes.

Plan ahead. Consider what you want to say ahead of time. State clearly what the problem is and how it affects those involved. Do not blame or name call. Antagonizing the other party only makes it harder for them to understand you. Do not blame the other person for everything or begin the conversation with your opinion of what should be done.

Give factual information. Do not interpret the other party's behavior. Instead give information about your own feelings. This does not judge if the feeling is right or wrong, but allows the speaker to know he/she has been heard. Remember the area of disagreement is a joint problem. Attack the problem, not each other. Keep in mind that you both are responsible for solving the problem. It is not just your problem.

Listen. Give the other party a chance to tell his or her side of the conflict completely. Try using reflective listening; try to learn how the other party feels. Although you may not agree with what is being said, tell the other person that you hear him/her and are glad that you are discussing the problem together.

Talk it through. Get all the issues and feelings out in the open. Do not leave out the part that seems too "difficult" to discuss or too insignificant to be important. Brainstorm for solutions. Consider a variety of ideas to help solve the problem. Do not judge the ideas as right or wrong, good or bad. Look for options that emphasize the common good. Two or more people cooperating produce lasting solutions more effectively than one person telling another to change.